

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 SSC-01 AID-05 TRSE-00 HEW-04 CU-04 PC-01
HA-05 /081 W

-----068991 042052Z /61

R 041943Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8997
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 0042

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, HO, MPOL, MORG
SUBJECT: CABINET CHANGES: THREE MILITARY MINISTERS CHANGED

REF: 77 TEGUCIGALPA 5802 (NOTAL)

1. AFTER MUCH SPECULATION, SO FAR ONLY THREE CABINET
MINISTERS AND FOUR SUB-SECRETARIES HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED AS
BEING CHANGED. CABINET MINISTERS LT. OLONELS EFRAIN GONZALEZ,
OMAR ANTONIO ZELAYA AND COL. ALONSO FLORES ARE TO BE
REASSIGNED. NAMED TO REPLACE THEM ARE: MINCULTURE, TOURISM
AND INFORMATION - LT. COL. ERICK O'CONNOR; MINDEFENSE AND
SECURITY - LT. COL. FRANCISCO RUIZ; MINGOVERNMENT AND JUSTICE -
LT. COL. JUAN ANGEL ARIAS.

2. O'CONNOR WAS PREVIOUSLY THE NAVY CHIEF, RUIZ COMMANDED
THE THIRD INFANTRY BATTALION (SAN PEDRO SULA) AND ARIAS WAS
HEAD OF THE NATIONAL POLICE (FUSEP). THEY WERE SWORN IN
ON JANUARY 2 BY GENERAL MELGAR. ZELAYA LEAVES DEFENSE AFTER ONE YEAR
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AS DOES HIS SUB-SECRETARY, COL. ESTEBAN ELVIR
ALTHOUGH ZELAYA, AT LEAST, DOES SO
BECAUSE OF HIS OWN WISH (TO BE ASSIGNED TO WASHINGTON).

3. THE SUB-SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE, COMMUNICATIONS AND
GOVERNMENT (COL. ESTEBAN ELVIR ARGENAL, MAJOR JULIO PEREZ
AND COL. (RET) JOSE ROSE BORJAS) ARE ALSO BEING CHANGED, AS

WELL AS THE CIVILIAN SUB-SECRETARY OF LABOR, GUSTAVO MEDRANO WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY RESIGNED. ONLY A REPLACEMENT FOR COMMUNICATIONS HAS BEEN CONFIRMED, LT. COL. ROLANDO MEJIA GARRIGO, FORMER G-3.

4. OTHER CHANGES ARE EXPECTED TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON.

5. COMMENT: BIO INFO ON NEW APPOINTEES FOLLOWS. TO DATE, NONE OF THE CIVILIAN MINISTERS HAVE BEEN REPLACED (REFTEL). THE EMBASSY HAS ENJOYED FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THE THREE NEW CABINET MINISTERS AND THESE CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE. LT. COL. O'CONNOR AS COMMANDER OF THE FLEDGLING HONDURAN NAVY WAS ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE AND OF ASSISTANCE IN MATTERS CONCERNING NARCOTICS CONTROL AND SEARCH AND RESCUE. WHILE THIS MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENT COULD NOT BE TURNED DOWN, O'CONNOR IS LEAVING AN ORGANIZATION IN WHOSE DEVELOPMENT HE HAS BEEN A MOVING FORCE FOR ONE THAT HAS BEEN REGARDED AS INEFFECTIVE. INDEED THE FIRST QUESTIONS PUT TO HIM BY THE PRESS AND MEDIA CONCERNED HIS PLANS FOR IMPROVING THE GOVERNMENT'S PUBLIC RELATIONS AND HIS NEW MINISTRY'S IMAGE.

6. RUIZ AND MEJIA GARRIGO, BOTH CONSIDERED "PROGRESSIVES" BY THEIR MORE CONSERVATIVE COLLEAGUES ON THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL (SDC) ARE TRANSFERRED TO JOBS THAT REMOVE THEM FROM TROOP CONTROL. THESE AND OTHER CHANGES APPARENTLY CONSOLIDATE THE PROCESS UNDERTAKEN TO
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TRANSFER THE "PROGRESSIVES" ON THE SDC TO POSITIONS OF LESS INFLUENCE. AS SUCH, THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE TRANSFERS BY THE ARMED FORCES RATHER THAN BY THE CHIEF OF STATE, GENERAL MELGAR EMPHASIZES THAT IT IS THE MILITARY MAKING THE CHANGES. IT MAY ALSO BE AN INDICATION OF THE SDC'S ACKNOWLEDGED PLANS TO ASSURE AN ORDERLY ELECTORAL PROCESS AS WELL AS TO HAVE A CONTINUE SAY IN THAT PROCESS. THE MORE UNIFIED SDC CAN BE EXPECTED TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN UNFOLDING POLITICAL EVENTS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TEGUCI00042
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780007-0524
Format: TEL
From: TEGUCIGALPA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780199/aaaadfvl.tel
Line Count: 104
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 49dd8be6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 TEGUCIGALPA 5802
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3827918
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CABINET CHANGES: THREE MILITARY MINISTERS CHANGED
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, MPOL, MORG, HO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/49dd8be6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014